

GOING BEHIND THE NOTES: EXPLORING THE GREAT PIANO COMPOSERS
AN 8-PART LECTURE CONCERT SERIES

SCHUMANN: DECIPHERING HIS PERSONAL MUSICAL LANGUAGE

Dr. George Fee, Pianist
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Performance: Traumerai (Dreaming), Op.15, No.7

Schumann's Music and Life (1810-1856)
Schumann's Pre-1840 Piano Music

Performance: Kinderszenen (Scenes from Childhood), Op.15
From Foreign Lands and People-A Curious Story-Catch me-
Entreating Child-Sufficient Happiness-An Important Event-
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More on Robert and Clara Schumann's Life and Robert's Music
Schumann's Mental and Physical Health
Schumann's Songs
Schumann's Influence and Romanticism

Performance: Third Movement of Fantasy, Op. 17

SCHUMANN READING

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- Brown, Thomas Alan. The Aesthetics of Robert Schumann. Peter Owen, 1968.
- *Daverio, John. Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age". Oxford University Press, 1997.
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- Wolff, Konrad, ed., On Music and Musicians: Robert Schumann, McGraw -Hill,1946
- Worthen, John. Robert Schumann: Life and Death of a Musician. Yale University Press, 2007.

SCHUMANN LISTENING

- Piano Music: Op.2*, 6*, 9*, 11, 12*, 13*, 15*, 16*, 17*, 18, 22, 26, 68, 82
- Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op.54
- Songs: Dichterliebe, Op. 48, Liederkreis, Op. 39
- Chamber Music: Piano Quartet, Op. 47, Piano Quartet, Op. 44
- 4 Symphonies
- Kindra Scharich, mezzo soprano, and Jeffrey LaDeur, piano—
Frauenliebe und Leben, Op.42 and Fantasy for Piano, Op. 17

ROBERT SCHUMANN: DECIPHERING HIS PERSONAL MUSICAL LANGUAGE

PERFORM: Traumerai

Schumann's Music and Life (1810-1856)

That was Traumerai, one of the world's most famous piano pieces. However, few people know a lot about Schumann or his music. Yet, there is no composer where it is MORE important to understand the background to fully comprehend the music.

Robert Schumann was a complex person. He was a total original. He daringly and stubbornly went his own way in everything.

His music was totally unconventional. It was very personal, even to the point of eccentricity. There was no precedent for music as personal and idiosyncratic as his.

Most people in Schumann's time did not understand his music and Chopin even said that Schumann's compositions were "not even music." In a sense, that statement contains some truth. In the eight centuries before Schumann, composers did not primarily write for self-expression. They wrote to satisfy the needs and desires of their employers, which were either a church or a court, and they wrote in well-established forms and styles.

That Schumann's music did not sound like that of his predecessors or his contemporaries is partly because he was basically self-taught. But in large part it is because his music is so frequently autobiographical and arose directly from events in his life. He wrote: "Anything that happens in the world has an effect on me – politics, literature, people, and I reflect about all of these things in my OWN way – these reflections then seek to find an outlet in music." Therefore, his music is not just music. It is a "diary" of whatever was in his mind.

Schumann was a hyper-sensitive, hyper-emotional person and his mind has been referred to as a "delicate seismograph." As a child he would play chords on the piano and weep uncontrollably. At the age of 18 when he learned of Schubert's death, he wept the entire night.

Extra-musical symbolism plays a large role in Schumann's music. While some of it has been decoded, much of it we will never know.

Why do I respond so positively to Schumann's music?

Because it IS so personal and so human, and it contains such sincerity and warmth. It seems not only to sing, but to actually speak to us. His unique poetry and intimacy reach our innermost being, and tenderly touch our hearts. In short, it is full of love.

It can express an aching, wistful, yearning for a blissful, peaceful, idyllic state of being, which, alas, cannot exist on this plane. It can make us cry. But it can express mystical, spiritual qualities which

take us out of ourselves. It can seek transcendence, and elevate and uplift us to a higher realm, as you will experience with the work which concludes today's presentation.

However, it can also frequently evidence a childlike, almost innocent, and naïve playfulness and charm. With its quixotic, capricious mood changes and unexpected turns it is a kaleidoscope of human life and feelings. His imagination seems to have no limits.

Humor abounds in Schumann's music. By comparison, there is not a lot of down-to-earth humor in many other 19th century composers' music. For example, Chopin's music has lightness, charm, and joy. But not what I would call humor.

Schumann loved the concept of spring, and his music reflects the refreshing optimism that accompanies the arrival of spring. His music frequently exhibits a joy in living, a geniality, and a heartiness.

It frequently expresses an ebullient enthusiasm and energy. At times this is representative of simply upbeat spirits and being in good humor. However, at other times, it can be representative of an eternal optimism that perhaps goodness can triumph, and that the positive can overcome the negative. With its rhythmic drive and excitement Schumann's music contains a rousing quality that encourages us to follow him in his crusade against mediocrity, materialism, and the lack of appreciation of true Beauty.

His music can soar and reach the heights of majesty and nobility – but never with any aspect of pretentiousness, which Schumann hated.

At its best, Schumann's music is inspired, and I believe it can bring out the best in us as human beings.

Why have I always, even from my childhood, been attracted to Schumann as a man?

Mainly because he had a big heart. Love, warmth, gentleness, and enthusiasm permeated his being. Even in his childhood Schumann seemed to exude an inherent goodness. He was gentle, sensitive, kind, good-natured and attracted to the highest ideals. In his adulthood, a sweetness always remained, and he never lost certain childlike qualities. He was never petty or malicious, rarely angry, and not argumentative. He was a devoted husband and father to his seven children.

He was generous and encouraging to others with his time and his energy. He never promoted himself or his music, but never stopped in his efforts to fight for what he perceived as greatness in music. In this quest, he was an uncompromising idealist.

As Harold Schonberg wrote: "Purity is not a word normally used in association with Schumann, but everything about him was pure-his life, his love, his dedication, his integrity, his mind, his music. "

It is in part the esthetics and philosophy of Romanticism that Schumann embodied, believed in, and demonstrated, that make the man Schumann and his music so very appealing. I will discuss this more later today. He was the first truly Romantic composer (Chopin was, in most ways, NOT philosophically a Romantic composer, as I will detail in the Chopin presentation.)

Let's do a quick overview of Schumann's life.

He was born in 1810- one year after Abe Lincoln, in the same year as Chopin, one year after Mendelssohn, and one year before Liszt.

He was the fifth and youngest child in a warm and loving home, and he received much encouragement and nurturing from his parents. He grew up in the idyllic, peaceful German town of Zwickau. With its population of 7,000, it was not an intellectual center. But it was surrounded by much natural beauty, which fostered his lifelong love of nature. (Today it has a population of 100,000 and is a center of the German auto industry, including Volkswagen.)

In his youth, Robert was popular and charming, and he had oodles of friends. He was admired for his enthusiasm, ambition, idealism, and insatiable curiosity about absolutely everything.

Schumann was always very soft-spoken, with an exceptionally quiet voice. After his teenage years he became increasingly taciturn, and this became a severe handicap the older he became. There is a humorous anecdote from the time when he and the composer Richard Wagner met when Schumann was in his 30's .After over an hour of Wagner being the only one talking ,he left Schumann, saying to someone:" After an hour you can't talk to yourself anymore."

Schumann was of medium size physically. He was extremely nearsighted, which caused him to always squint. Everyone noted his pursed lips, which gave an impression of perpetually whistling. In later life he tended to wear black clothes, which made people think he was a clergyman.

At age 18, to satisfy his widowed mother, Schumann entered law school – first in Leipzig and then in Heidelberg. He rarely attended any lectures in law but did acquire a lifelong love of beer and cigars. At age 20, he resolved to devote himself full-time to the piano, and moved back to Leipzig to study intensively with the highly respected teacher, Friedrich Wieck. Leipzig was a major intellectual center and would remain his home until the age of 34.

An injury to his second and third fingers ended Schumann's hopes for a career as a performing pianist. It is uncertain what caused the injury. It was possibly the use of a mechanical device to strengthen certain fingers. Or it may have been overuse of a "dummy" keyboard – a substitute for a real piano when no piano was available. But it was probably simply over-practicing with poor technical habits. At age 22, Schumann began to devote himself intensively to composition. At age 24, he founded a significant musical magazine which still exists today. At age 25, he fell in love with 16-year-old Clara Wieck, the daughter of his former piano teacher, and 5 years later they were married. At age 40, after 6 years in Dresden, they moved to Düsseldorf where Robert assumed the position of municipal music director, for which he was ill-suited, and which

ended disastrously. At age 43, he entered an asylum for the mentally ill, and died at age 46 in 1856.

Schumann's Pre-1840 Piano Music

It is important to divide Schumann's compositions into those written before and after 1840. The pre-1840 works are nearly all for solo piano. They were initially conceived while improvising at the piano and were hastily written down. Then they were subjected to careful revision. They were the product of a highly emotional, largely musically untutored youth in his 20's. The 1840 and later compositions will be discussed a little later. The following discussion applies primarily to the piano music of 1832 – 1839.

Schumann's music of the 1830's is characterized by two significant factors: One--it is comprised of fragments; and Two--it contains a juxtaposition of extreme contrasts. The fragmentary nature can be viewed partially as stemming from Schumann's unique personality. He himself wrote: "I can never logically proceed along a line which I may have started well." It is known that Schumann spoke in very disconnected sentences.

However, in large part, the fragmentary nature stems from the influence of literature and philosophy. The biggest influence in Schumann's life was literature, and this was his primary love as a teenager. Music was clearly secondary at that time. He had a role model in his gentle, quiet father – a novelist, writer of articles, and an owner of a bookstore and publishing company. As a teenager, Robert read an enormous number of Greek tragedies, all of Schiller, and much of Goethe. During these years he founded a club to study German literature, and he wrote his own poetry and novels.

The crucial literary influence on Schumann's music is Jean Paul Richter, known simply as Jean Paul. Schumann fell in love with his works as a teenager, and they remained a lifelong fanatical obsession. Schumann's biographer, John Daverio, has done a superb job of elucidating the Jean Paul influence on Schumann, and the appendix in his biography even supplies an English translation of a portion of Jean Paul's writing. I am now going to spend some time discussing Jean Paul's writing because I believe it holds many of the keys to how to listen to Schumann's music, as well as how to play it.

The most important influences of Jean Paul on Schumann were his view of life as a series of isolated fragments, and his employment of an incredibly fragmentary writing style. For example, dashes appear in abundance; parenthetical asides and outrageous metaphors are constantly inserted; digressions into fantasy pop up out of nowhere; and brief, pithy, whimsical aphoristic statements appear suddenly.

Jean Paul was not unique in his love of fragments. The use of literary fragments was espoused by many of the German early romantic philosophers and writers in the late 18th century. One of the leaders of these important writers was Friedrich Schlegel, who in 1798 defined the fragment as follows: "A fragment should be like a little work of

art, complete in itself, separated from the rest of the universe." The Classical Era in the 18th-century had, in all the arts, prized an esthetic of perfection and cohesive unity. Now a new esthetic was taking hold, and the concept of the fragment was sought out and became common.

In addition to composing with the use of fragments, continual contrasts are a feature of Schumann's pre-1840 piano pieces. Some people have claimed Schumann was schizophrenic, though this is far from widely accepted. What IS fact and not conjecture, is that Schumann perceived himself as being divided between opposing, widely contrasting human characteristics. He assigned names to the two opposite sides of himself:

--Florestan represented activity, unbridled energy, rambunctiousness, and spontaneity
--Eusebius represented passivity, introspection, and dreaminess.

We all have extroverted and introverted sides. But Schumann was unusual in being constantly obsessed with this duality and his feeling continuously caught between his two sides. (There are those who would attribute this to his being a Gemini, having been born on June 8.)

Part of Schumann's obsession with this issue was due to the influence of Jean Paul's constant employment of contrasting opposites. Jean Paul even defined humor as "the infinity of contrast," and believed that the more abrupt the contrasting juxtaposition, the more humorous. For example, he placed the trivial beside the sublime, and the grotesque next to the profound.

A friend once told me that he did not grasp Schumann's music because Schumann's music does not have the same sense of direction that Beethoven's has. What that friend did not understand is that one cannot listen to Schumann's music with the same expectations one has when listening to Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert's, or Bach's. music. One cannot play Schumann's music in the same way that one plays other composers' music.

To receive the messages of Schumann's music, the listener needs to be in a frame of mind to expect the unexpected. Schumann is a master of subverting our expectations. Schumann's melodies frequently go where we do not expect them. His colorful and expressive harmonies are unique and full of surprises. His many distinctive uses of rhythm can at times seem puzzling, even to experienced musicians. Adding these melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic characteristics to his practice of writing in fragments and his frequent contrasts, makes it essential to relish the spur-of-the-moment, improvisatory qualities of Schumann's music. His music has an open-ended quality, rather than a predetermined sense of direction. Like many people and things in life, Schumann's music needs to be appreciated for what it IS, rather than faulted for what it is NOT, and never was even intended to be.

Scenes from Childhood, Op.15

You will shortly hear Schumann's Kinderszenen, Scenes from Childhood. They were composed at the age of 28 and consist of 13 short pieces, which last about 18 minutes. These pieces were not written for children to play. Schumann would later write a number of compositions for children and would also create a collection of maxims and aphorisms for young people. The Scenes from Childhood were written for adult players to play and for adult listeners to reflect upon childhood. Schumann said he was inspired by Clara's comment that he often "seemed like a child." The Romantics had much veneration for the concept of childhood, and they yearned to recover the innocence and beautiful natural state which they believed was usually lost in adulthood.

When the initial impetus for a composition was an external stimulus, Schumann's intent was not to portray anything literally, but rather to portray what he called "soul states."

Schumann's titles of individual pieces were always supplied AFTER his pieces were written, as hints to the interpreter of possible moods.

Even though you will sense fragments and hear contrast within a piece and between the pieces in the Scenes from Childhood, hopefully you will also sense a unity in the work. All great art needs at least some degree of unity, and Schumann, in subtle ways, supplies unity within individual pieces as well as within his groups of small pieces. One way he achieved this was by employing the same small sequence of notes throughout the pieces. These have been termed "cells". For example, in the Scenes from Childhood a four-note descending figure is clearly found in every one of the 13 pieces. The interval of a rising sixth is also evident at the beginning of many of the pieces.

I hope you experience the imagination, the tenderness, the humanity, the warmth, and the love in this music. Schumann cited the obvious fact that these pieces were more melodic, gentle and cheerful than much of his other piano music of the 1830's.

Over half of Schumann's piano works of the 1830s end softly, and so it is not unusual that Schumann chose to conclude the Scenes from Childhood with the introspective "Poet Speaks." It is not surprising that one who truly revered poets, and who was one himself in words and in music, gave the poet the opportunity to muse and reflect on the previous 12 pieces and provide a touching benediction. I think you will enjoy hearing the famous Traumerai, in its actual context. It lies at the exact center of the Scenes from Childhood and is in a key very distant from the rest of the pieces.

PERFORM: Kinderszenen, Op.15

While reflectivity lies at the core of Schumann's being, as perhaps it does in all of us, Schumann's music is frequently passionately abandoned and wildly excited. At

times it is downright daemonic and terrifying. You must listen to Schumann's Kreisleriana, (pronounced like chrsy-ler-ee-an-na beginning with a "K") Opus 16. This 30-minute work was inspired by the writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann, whose works were a major influence on Schumann. Hoffmann's writings depicted a bizarre world of darkness and weird fantasy, a hallucinatory world filled with the macabre, the occult and horror. At times Hoffmann's writing could be terrifying and veer close to madness.

Schumann was obsessed with Hoffmann's writings and was most attracted to the most grotesque, frightening, troubling and neurotic aspects of Hoffmann's works. "One hardly dares to breathe while reading it," Schumann said. This may sound peculiar. But one should remember that in those days there were no electric lights, and it was much easier than today to envision terrifying, ghostly, eerie apparitions when sitting by the dying embers of a fire or by candlelight. The romantic writers, philosophers, and artists were fascinated by the night, the mysterious, the subconscious, and dreams.

Be sure and listen to a CD or YouTube performances of Kreisleriana to experience Schumann's portrayal of darkness. As his future wife, Clara, said of that work: "Sometimes your music actually frightens me."

Thoughts on Performing Schumann's Piano Music

The main prerequisite for the successful communication of Schumann's music is warmth and sincerity, and a strong belief in the communicative power of Schumann's music. One must allow the music to yearn, to weep, to dream, and to reflect a sense of wonder. One must be willing to open one's heart and personally reveal vulnerability and tenderness. Schumann believed that "only what comes from the heart, only what is inwardly created and sung has permanence."

Fundamental to Schumann performance is a warm, singing tone which is achieved by caressing the keys.

Young pianists are so often promoted as "dazzling," "captivating," "thrilling," etc. However, the source of a great musician's playing is not youthful exuberance, raw emotion and certainly not a technical apparatus by itself. One of Schumann's aphorisms was: "Many things will only become clear to you when you are old." There is so much truth in this statement – not just in music, but also in all areas of life.

It is more often the older artist who has attained the mellowness to sing naturally at the piano, which, by the way, I believe, is a primary goal of piano playing.

They say that success in real estate is due to "location, location, location." What to me playing the piano is about is "singing, singing, singing." It is about allowing the music to unfold. It is about creating a line – whether it consists of horizontal single notes, or a series of many consecutive vertical chords. It is about hearing what is actually coming out of the instrument and not drowning in one's own emotional

absorption in the music. It is about expressing clarity when there are thick textures in the lower registers of the instrument- where Schumann so often writes.

It is about finding, and enjoying bringing out, all the many inner and lower melodies in music. Schumann's music is not like many of his lesser contemporaries' and predecessors' music which was primarily melody and accompaniment. His musical textures comprise multiple horizontal lines occurring simultaneously. Schumann made a lifelong study of J.S. Bach's music and the influence of J. S. Bach can be found throughout Schumann's music. I will show some examples at the piano soon.

Schumann's music also demands a temperament which can express a child-like playfulness and imagination. Two of Schumann's aphorisms were: "He who cannot play with the instrument cannot play it at all," and "To play the instrument you must be one with it.

A player must also have the temperament to capriciously "switch gears" and "turn on a dime" at the mercurial juxtapositions of contrasting mood swings in Schumann's music. That is why I emphasized the influence of Jean Paul earlier. One isn't really playing Schumann if one doesn't capture these qualities.

A player should feel he/she is spontaneously improvising the music and that one is never playing a work the same way twice. It was said by his contemporaries that Schumann conducted his own music with different speeds in every performance. (On the other hand, they said that he was very consistent from performance to performance when he conducted the music of other composers.)

In contrast to classic era music, Schumann's music provides the performer an unlimited number of opportunities to express freedom, and to personalize the music. We pianists need to take these opportunities! Schumann's music begs for it. It needs our personal vision to fully bring it to life! We need to make the music our own!

Despite my endorsing much freedom and individuality in Schumann performance, I do have two cautionary thoughts:

One-Tempo selection is a crucial decision in every piece of music and many of the greatest composers are very clearly and emphatically on record as believing that adopting an appropriate tempo is the primary responsibility of an interpreter. Schumann counseled that "dragging and hurrying are equally great faults." His slower music can die if it is played too slowly or if it is played with an exaggerated expression. All slow music of any composer needs a sense of direction and shape and should maintain a naturalness and a flow.

Two-I believe that the biggest challenge in playing Schumann's music is when the music is tempestuous, impassioned and agitated. The issue becomes how to realize the proper balance between abandon and control. For those of you who are not performers, I have just shared with you what I believe is a central dilemma in all musical

performance--how to realize the right balance between abandon and control. For those here who are performers, you know all-too- well first-hand what I am saying.

Excessive emotional abandon when performing Schumann's music can be reckless and dangerous. Schumann's own playing was apparently very impetuous, with his teacher describing him as a "wild player who created waves of sound with a pedal always halfway down." However, such playing cannot be the model for a performing pianist in the 21st century.

I believe that the ultimate source of great art is described in the words of Wordsworth: "emotion recollected in tranquility." The great pianist Artur Schnabel astutely said that "the real artistry is found in the space between the notes." The legendary singer Leontyne Price told singers to "sing off of the interest in their voices and not off the principal." Emotional feelings by themselves are not the vehicle by which a great artist communicates. The emotions are the reservoir which the performer has in reserve in his/her subconscious, without which there is no great art or deep communication.

A performer's emotion must be harnessed in such a way that it becomes comprehensible. The composer had to convert his emotions into a language for the interpreter to decipher. The interpreter then must convert his/her emotional responses to the music into an organized presentation which a listener is able to grasp. Music is a language, and a player must know how to truly convey the language.

Most nonprofessional musicians do not realize what musical interpretation is grounded upon. Musical interpretation is awareness of structure. Musical interpretation is architecture. This process is the same whether it is employed by the world's most insightful musicians, or by students at their first lesson. Musicianship can be learned by, and taught to, anyone – at any age – and at any level. It is not that some people "have it" and some people do not.

Performance success rests primarily on the analysis of the relationship of every note in a piece to every other note. This must be examined both on the horizontal and vertical planes. I will show some examples in a few moments.

Fantasy Pieces, Op.12

We will now listen to three of the *Fantasiestücke*, Fantasy Pieces, of Opus 12. There are eight pieces in the set, and it is interesting that all are in flat keys, which enhance feelings of warmth. 1836 had been an extremely difficult year emotionally for Schumann. However, he felt a sense of rejuvenation in 1837 when these pieces were written. They would always hold a special place in his heart.

The title is borrowed from E. T. A. Hoffman's collection of literary works where the characters have wide mood swings. The pieces in Schumann's Fantasy Pieces are more self-contained and self-sufficient than many of his works and they are less

fragmentary than much of his music. However, they reflect the contrasting sides of Schumann's personality, the extroverted Florestan, and the introverted and dreamy Eusebius.

The first we hear today, *Warum*, represents Eusebius. Schumann could evoke yearning, wistful, plaintive moods which are unlike any other music.

I mentioned earlier that whimsical twists were a common feature in Jean Paul's writings, and the second Fantasy piece today is even entitled "Whims." Schumann instructed the player to play it with a sense of humor.

He asks the player to perform the third of these pieces which I am playing today with a hearty spirit. It is not labeled as a march. But so often Schumann's pieces evidence a rousing march-like spirit. It is significant that Schumann gives the last word in the complete set of Fantasy Pieces to Eusebius, with its quiet, reflective ending. Anticipating their future wedding, Robert wrote to Clara that one could hear wedding bells in that ending.

After this 10-minute performance, we will take a break. Then in our remaining 30- plus minutes together, we will explore more of Robert and Clara Schumann's life and Robert's music, and conclude with one of his most deeply meaningful movements, one of the greatest movements in the entire piano literature.

I said that I would show some examples of analyzing and interpreting Schumann's music, and before performing the selections from the Fantasy Pieces, we will look at "Warum", from the Fantasy Pieces, the first of today's selections. The score is on your program.

GO TO PIANO: Show: the primarily 4 voice texture with the primary melody which migrates through many registers; the answering melodies; the bass foundation; the continuous syncopated notes and chords which provide a swinging lilt; the main structural points of the piece; use of rubato and subtleties of timing for expressivity.

PERFORM: Fantasy Pieces, Op.12, Nos. 3, 4, 8

10 MINUTE BREAK

More on Schumann's Life and His Music

The most important person in the life of Robert Schumann was Clara Wieck. They first crossed paths when he came to study piano with her father. At that time, she was nine and he was 18. There would be relationships with other women in Robert's young adulthood. But by 1835, when Robert was 25 and Clara 16, they were in love. For the rest of their lives Clara would be closely intertwined with Robert's music.

From 1835 until 1840 both of their lives were a nightmare as her father stopped at nothing to separate them. Making her into the world's top pianist had been his life's goal even before she had been born. He saw Robert as an impediment to that, as well as an unsuitable choice for his daughter. Wieck would forbid their being together, attempt to prohibit their correspondence, and he even fought them by taking them to court. While his concerns may have had validity, his tactics and behavior during these years were indefensible, as even the courts determined. But the despair he caused Robert during these five years found its outlet in Robert's compositions, which would not have been the same without this anguish in his life.

What did Clara see in Robert? Above all she had boundless admiration for him which always remained throughout her 77 years of life. When she was a child, he had been like a big brother to her, and she looked up to him from that point onward. She never ceased believing in him, as a composer and as a human being.

Robert saw in Clara a strong woman, with enormous talent, high intelligence, and a fierce determination. Even as a teenager she was a touring concert pianist – the first woman to ever extensively do so. This demanded enormous fortitude and she would continue to tour until her death.

Robert was incredibly fortunate, musically, and personally, to have Clara at his side for the remainder of his life. It was not at all the idyllic life which some superficial storytellers have sometimes tried to portray. Clara endured 10 pregnancies and bore eight children during their 14 years living together in marriage. It was always a perpetual challenge trying to make ends meet financially. Robert never generated significant income from his compositions, and the expenses of the magazine he ran for 10 years absorbed all of the subscription income. His brief attempt to teach and to conduct later in life ended in total failure.

Clara's concerts were the primary source of the family income. However, her career was severely compromised by her decision to make it secondary to Robert's composing. She believed that an interpreter must take second place to the composer, and her faith that Robert was destined to have a place in music history as a great composer never wavered.

Their living quarters were never large, and Robert could not compose if she was practicing. Their day consisted of Robert composing from 9 to 12; their walking together at noon time; eating their big meal of the day in the European custom at 1 o'clock; and Robert again composing from two until five o'clock. Robert would then go to his favorite coffee house for a beer and to read the newspapers. This provided Clara her only window in the day to practice. They would then have a light supper together. That coffee house still exists in Leipzig and honors the corner where Robert always sat.

Robert kept a detailed diary through much of his life. It has been preserved and is invaluable to scholars. It is interesting that Robert suggested to Clara at the inception of their marriage that they keep a joint diary specifically relating to their marriage. Its

purpose was for each of them to record their personal feelings of joy and disappointments so that their marriage could be continually improved. That diary also survives and has provided scholars with much personal information.

Not only did Robert's composing inhibit Clara's practice and growth as a musician which had been her identity all her life. Robert's self-esteem suffered as a male in the 19th century who was not the breadwinner. Since his wife was the famous one in the family, he endured a number of occasions when even educated people would ask him: "Herr Schumann, do you know anything about music?" But their devotion to each other, though strained at times, was never seriously threatened.

Schumann hated virtuosity for its own sake and what is not in Schumann's music is any superficiality. This is very different from the music of his contemporaries. Keyboard music in his time was littered with glittering showpieces. Opera was frequently a vehicle for the virtuosity of the singers and a grand display of stage effects. Orchestral music had not found a real successor to Beethoven since Schubert's orchestral works were still virtually unknown at this time. Schumann stood almost alone in demanding that music fulfill a serious purpose. His view represented the continuation of the musical aesthetics and ideals of Beethoven – that music should not be mere entertainment, but rather provide a moral uplift, come from the heart, and deeply move listeners. Schumann believed that while literature in his time had established high standards, musical standards were in decline- and he was right!

To combat this situation is why Schumann founded his magazine, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, translated as *New Magazine for Music*. He was editor, owner, and chief critic. His idealistic purpose was to uphold the tradition of Mozart, Beethoven, and other composers of serious music, against what he viewed as the shallowness of the music of his time. It furnished him a satisfying and meaningful opportunity to combine his literary skills with his immense knowledge of music of the past, as well as the music of his own time. Schumann is unanimously considered one of the greatest writers on music of all time. Both the content and the quality of his writing were extraordinary. The magazine took a huge amount of Schumann's time and energy during ten of his most productive years, from ages 24 to 34. But the idealistic cause was worth it to him.

After 1840 Schumann wrote very different music from his piano compositions of the 1830's. Clara urged him, after having specialized in piano music, to undertake the larger forms of music – symphonies, chamber music, opera, oratorio and church music. He also felt a calling to pursue these challenges, finding the piano now to be " too confining."

Many people do not realize that Schumann composed a huge amount of music from 1840 -- 1853--over 70% of his total output. He no longer composed at the piano and did not even desire a piano to be in the room. This music is no longer a product of a volatile youth spontaneously pouring out his emotional turmoil. Rather it is the result of being a mature, methodical, composer.

There is such a wide diversity of stylistic aspects in these later works that they cannot easily be summarized. Some of the works are extremely experimental, and Schumann wrote that "I have always endeavored to bring something new to light in each of my compositions." But some of the later works were written with the motivation to generate needed income and were intentionally intended to be very accessible. These are partially a result of Clara having asked Robert to "please write something people will understand" so that more income could be generated.

The works written in the first few years after 1840- the four symphonies, the piano concerto, the piano quartet and quintet- have achieved great popularity. However, other than these works, the remainder of his vast number of post-1840 works are almost never performed.

Introspection was always a part of Schumann's temperament. But as he aged, the introspection increased, and it clearly dominated in his later compositions. That is also why his later works have never achieved the popularity of his earlier. However, connoisseurs of Schumann's music consider some of the later works to be among his greatest works.

Schumann's Mental and Physical Health

On a number of occasions throughout his life Schumann suffered major anxiety and panic attacks, melancholy, depression, suicidal thoughts, and chronic insomnia. He was haunted all his life by the fear of going mad.

There were three periods in his life when he suffered a complete nervous collapse. The first was when he was 23. Many relatives had died, and he realized he could not achieve his pianistic goals due to his hand injury. The second occasion was 11 years later, after accompanying Clara on a tremendously exhausting six-month journey to Russia for her concerts. Recovering from this mental and physical collapse proved more of a challenge than the 1833 collapse. But Schumann did, and composed very productively for another nine years. Alas, early in 1854, Schumann became delusional, began imagining hearing bizarre music and other sounds, and had difficulty speaking coherently. This was accompanied by severe dizziness, tremors, and jerking limbs. In February of 1854, he attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine River--the river he had immortalized in his third Symphony. Fishermen rescued him and returned him to his home. Fearing he might cause harm to his family, he asked to be taken to an asylum and this request was carried out.

There are those who believe Schumann's insanity was caused by schizophrenia or by being manic-depressive. They cite the fact that mental illness existed in some of Schumann's ancestors, one sibling and one of his children. However, the facts of Schumann's life do not support these viewpoints.

What is extremely likely is that Schumann was experiencing tertiary stage syphilis, which was causing progressive paralysis of the nervous system. Schumann's

diaries reveal his having acquired syphilis at the age of 21, and the girl's name appears in his diary, or at least the name by which he chose to refer to her. Tertiary stage syphilis appears decades after the original infection, and Schumann clearly showed the symptoms of tertiary stage syphilis in late 1853 and early 1854.

He resided at the asylum, located near Bonn, Germany, for nearly 2 1/2 years. Some days he was somewhat coherent, but on other days, not at all. His feeble attempts to compose were later destroyed, being considered unrepresentative of his work.

Friends Johannes Brahms and Joseph Joachim were permitted to visit on various occasions. Wife Clara was not – until his death was imminent. She always treasured the fact that when she arrived two days before he died, he apparently showed recognition of her. Schumann was buried in Bonn, which is meaningful since that is where his idol, Beethoven, had been born 86 years before.

For the 40 years after Robert's death, starting at age 37, Clara was a single mother, raising the seven surviving children, (one had died), and supporting them by teaching and touring – dressed in the black clothes of the German widow. The relationship of Clara and Robert Schumann was not the story book experience some have made it. But it is more meaningful in that it truly demonstrated the commitment and dedication "for better or worse" and "in sickness and health". Clara would have known she could have lived a comfortable life had she not resolved as a teenager to devote her life to the man in whom she so believed. What she experienced was four stressful years before they could be married, 16 years of severe challenges while married, and 40 years as a widow promoting her husband's music and his lofty ideals.

Schumann's Songs

1840 was an important year in musical history, not only because Robert and Clara married, but also because their marriage was the primary cause of Robert suddenly throwing himself into writing only songs. A German song is called a Lied, and therefore songs in German are known collectively as "Lieder."

Lieder were extremely popular in Germany beginning in the later 18th century. Robert had written several as a teenager. However, he and many serious musicians had considered Lieder to be a lesser genre to symphonies, chamber music and large piano pieces. But Lieder were sung in the home by family members and there was a huge market for them. Schumann in 1840 knew he and Clara would now need much more income since soon there would be many little Schumann mouths to feed. (Robert's attitude was, "the more children, the better". I have to wonder if Clara shared his attitude.) Pragmatically the music to write were Lieder. What resulted are among the greatest music ever written in any genre, and undisputedly among the greatest and most loved Lieder of all time. Had he written no piano music, no symphonies and no chamber music Schumann's Lieder alone would place him among the great composers.

What began as a moneymaking project ignited one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling times in Schumann's life." How blissful to write for the voice. . . I'd like to sing myself to death like a Nightingale." Robert was in his glory. His love of poetry could now be united with his creativity in music. Much of the poetry of the time was truly great poetry and Schumann had the experience and insight to recognize, and to be attracted to, truly great poetry. Poetry was central to the German Romantic movement and much of it was intensely emotional Schumann's highly romantic music and complete mastery of the Lieder genre intensified the emotional experience for listeners.

Every emotion is vividly and intensely depicted in his Lieder, and with tremendous subtlety. Being primarily a pianist himself, Schumann gave the piano, for the first time ever, a role of equal importance to the singer. Sometimes it almost seems as if the piano has the more important role.

Schumann wrote 125 Lieder in 1840 alone and he would write 125 more, beginning nine years later. A pianist should know Schumann's Lieder intimately in order to play his piano music with understanding. If you are a non-pianist, your life will be enriched by getting to know Dichterliebe, Liederkreis, and the Frauenliebe und Leben cycles of songs. English translations are easily accessible.

Some of you attended Kindra Scharich and my Lieder concert at the Midland Center for the Arts last March 2nd. We performed some Schumann Lieder. You can purchase one of Kindra Scharich's CD's which includes the Frauenliebe und Leben (Women's Life and Loves) cycle. Experts in Lieder have deemed Ms. Scharich to be in the same league as the finest exponents of Lieder that there ever have been.

I urge you to learn more about Lieder, and you can go to my website, www.dersnah-fee.com/lieder.html and watch videos of Ms. Scharich and my three-part concert-lecture series on the history of Lieder. In addition to spoken text similar to the present piano composer series, 59 Lieder are performed, including some of Schumann.

Schumann's Influence and Romanticism

In his lifetime Schumann was more influential as a writer than as a composer. His published compositions sold poorly. Performances of most of his works failed to achieve much success with many audiences. For example, Franz Liszt was ecstatic about Schumann's music, but felt he could only perform short selections from only some of Schumann's pieces for his public. Yet, shortly after his death, Schumann's music, and many of his ideals caught on. This success was not only with listeners but also with younger composers. Some scholars have Robert Schumann on their extremely short lists of the most influential composers in the entire history of music.

Schumann's influence on Brahms has always been obvious – so much so that in annoyance Brahms once said: "All I learned from Schumann was how to play chess." However, when in better spirits, Brahms wrote, "I will always take this noble, pure artist as my model." Brahms' music shows how Schumann served as a model to future

composers in two significant aspects: One-his noble, serious ideals and esthetics, and Two- the elements of his music, such as his harmony, melody, counterpoint, rhythm, and formal elements.

Bruckner and Mahler's symphonies emulate Schumann's serious approach to the Symphony. The astonishing Lieder of Hugo Wolf, who in many respects is considered to be the greatest composer of Lieder ever, are very indebted to Schumann's Lieder, as are the Lieder of most everyone who wrote Lieder after Schumann.

Alban Berg paid tribute to Schumann's influence on him and Edward Elgar wrote: "Robert Schumann is my ideal."

The Russian composers were highly influenced by Schumann, most notably Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff. Quite surprisingly, the French were also. Debussy, who said complimentary things only about a half dozen composers, said he wished his own music "to be to the left of Robert Schumann and to the right of Frederic Chopin." The fragmentary nature of Debussy's music has much in common with Schumann's music, as does Debussy's identification with the Symbolist movement.

Camille Manclair, poet, and friend of the Symbolist poet Stephane Mallarme wrote: "Robert Schumann already realized everything the Symbolists only dreamed of."

The Symbolists were members of a late 19th century movement, primarily in France, which was an outgrowth of the romantic movement. They emphasized spirituality, the imagination, and dreams. They wrote in an indirect and suggestive manner, avoiding matter-of-fact descriptions, and utilizing symbolic imagery reflecting the state of the soul and the pursuit of a higher reality. Indeed, Schumann's music does have much in common with the Symbolists.

The Romantic movement deeply influenced Schumann, and he himself played a very major role in the movement – possibly a larger role than any other composer. He did not use the word "romantic" to describe his aesthetics or his music, and instead viewed them as a synthesis of the classical past and his own present. But there is no question that, along with preserving the serious ideals of the past, Schumann was in the vanguard of what we have come to term the Romantic movement.

What was Romanticism really about and what were the romantics seeking? The German Romantics of the very late 18th century and early 19th century felt alienated from the material, physical world, which was being transformed by the Industrial Revolution and increasing urbanization. They saw themselves as Wanderers, with a heightened sensitivity and individuality. They sought to transcend what could be seen and known and were seeking the Infinite. Believing the rationality of the 18th century Enlightenment to be an insufficient guide to living, they sought the irrational, and the subjective, and greatly trusted their emotions.

The Romantics believed that one should seek to escape from one's own prison by seeking the metaphysical and the spiritual. It has been said, "Romanticism is always religious" – though it was not usually in denominational terms. Schumann himself said he was "religious – but without religion." The primary visual artist of German Romanticism, Caspar David Friedrich wrote: "Shut your physical eye and look at your subject first of all in your spiritual one."

The Romantics found solace from solitude and nature. Nature was viewed as the essence of the spiritual and to them the forest became a cathedral. Nature became one's spiritual home and was seen as a mother to human beings. This explains some of the nostalgia for the innocence of lost childhood. Schumann very much espoused these beliefs. At age 21 he wrote: "The earth is not a pleasure garden but rather a holy temple of nature."

So many philosophers, poets and painters viewed MUSIC as the best vehicle with which to reach the Infinite. Its language of the emotions was the perfect vehicle of Romanticism – it could speak the unspeakable. It was the writers E. T. A. Hoffmann and Jean Paul advocating the supreme power of music which led Schumann to opt for music over literature as his profession. Jean Paul wrote: "Music is the striving of man to reach the infinite." Schumann himself wrote: "Music is always the language in which one can converse with the beyond."

We do not live in a Romantic Age today and often fail to spiritually relate to Romanticism. However, I hope I have helped decipher some aspects of Robert Schumann's uniquely personal musical language and provide you more appreciation for Schumann's music. I will have succeeded if each of you listens to more of Schumann's music. His well-known works are all abundantly represented for free on YouTube. I would suggest starting with the list of works provided in the program, with the most accessible having been provided an asterisk.

I also provide some book titles for your further reading. I most recommend John Daverio's biography. There is so much about Schumann that will always remain uncertain and open to conjecture, and many biographies contain much speculation and unproven hypotheses. Caveat emptor!

Schumann and his music will always remain somewhat undecipherable. That is part of the mystery and nature of Romanticism. It is intangible. It cannot be described in words. It is open-ended and is never definitively completed. It allows each of us to perceive what we need to perceive and wish to perceive at any given point in our lives.

Fantasy in C Major, Op.17

We will give the last word today to the music of Schumann – the 12 minute third and last movement of the Fantasy, Opus 17. The entire fantasy is one of the many examples of Schumann's life experiences being intertwined with the creation of his compositions. The first movement was a product of the desperation which Schumann

felt in 1836 at age 26, when he was separated from his beloved Clara. He later told Clara that the movement was a "deep lament for you."

The Fantasy also became intertwined with Schumann's deep admiration for Beethoven. He intended his publication proceeds to go towards building a monument to Beethoven and in this work, he quoted a theme from Beethoven's song cycle, "To the Distant Beloved." But most of all, it is the spiritual affinity with the world of Beethoven in the third movement. It is extraordinary how the 26-year-old, emotionally troubled Schumann could appear to enter into the world of spiritual aspiration and transcendence achieved by the musical Titan, Beethoven.

I urge you to listen to the entire 30-minute work. The first movement is highly impassioned and the second movement extraordinarily energetic. It is absolutely one of the great monuments of all music. On the same CD with Kindra Scharich's *Frauenliebe und Leben*, you can hear the entire Schumann Fantasy as performed by her excellent pianist in the song cycle, Jeffrey LaDeur.

Schumann's music originated deep in his own private world and is best received in our most private world. At the beginning of the Fantasy, Schumann placed the following quotation from the great romantic writer Friedrich Schlegel:

"Resounding through all the notes
In the Earth's colorful dream
There sounds a faint long drawn note
For the one who listens in secret."

PERFORM: 3rd Movement of Schumann Fantasy, Op.17

